A

SERMON

Preached at

WHITE-HALL,

IN

LENT,

On *Friday*, *March* 20. $168\frac{4}{5}$.

BY

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LUKE XVI. 31.

——*If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead.*

THE Parable of the Rich man and *Lazarus* in the Goſpel is ſo well known, that it is needleſs to relate the Particulars of it. Theſe Words are the Concluſion of that Parable, and they are made the Words of *Abraham*, who being in Paradiſe, is brought in as ſpeaking them to the Rich man in Hell.

The Occaſion was this. This now Poor man

not being able to obtain the leaſt Comfort or Refreſhment for himſelf under that unſupportable anguiſh he endured; bethinks himſelf of his Friends and Relations in the World, and caſts about how to prevent their coming to that ſad condition. And for this purpoſe, he begs of *Abraham*, that he would be pleaſed to ſend the Happy *Lazarus* into the World again, to teſtifie to his Brethren what he knew and had ſeen concerning the State of the other Life; and to exhort them to a timely Repentance, leſt they ſhould come into that place of Torment in which he was.

To this Requeſt, *Abraham* thus anſwers. *They had Moſes and the Prophets*, which did plainly enough teſtifie againſt their Sins, and offered ſufficient Motives to them to repent; and therefore there was no need of ſuch extraordinary Means as he deſired.

But this Anſwer did not ſatisfie the miſerable man. Still he purſues his former Requeſt. *Nay, Father Abraham*, (ſaith he) *but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.* There was no reſiſting ſuch an Argument as that. If *Lazarus*, whom they all had known living, and now knew to be dead, ſhould riſe again, and perſonally come to them, and tell them in what a ſad condition he had ſeen their Friend, and that they muſt all expect to run the ſame Fortune, if they did not change

change their Courſe of Living: This would come cloſe to them, and be more convincing than a hundred Arguments drawn from the Books of *Moſes* and the Prophets, which were written many Ages before their time, and ſo conſequently could not be preſumed to have ſo great a force as an Argument drawn from their own Senſe and Experience.

To this Reply of the Rich man, *Abraham* peremptorily rejoins in the Words of the Text. *If they hear not Moſes and the Prophets, neither will they be perſuaded though one roſe from the dead.*

To omit leſſer Matters that may be obſerved from theſe Words; the Point which primarily, and moſt naturally ſeems to be offered to our Conſideration from them, is this. *That thoſe who give no credit to a ſetled ſtanding Revelation of God once well atteſted, or are not thereby prevailed upon to reform their Evil manners; neither in all probability would they be prevailed upon, though a particular Miracle was wrought by God in order to their Converſion; as, for inſtance, though one ſhould riſe from the dead and appear to them.*

Now to ſatisfie every one of the Truth of this Propoſition, it will be abundantly ſufficient to make out theſe two things.

Firſt, That there is really more force and weight in a Publick ſtanding Revelation of God, ſuch as that

that was by *Moſes* and the Prophets here mentioned, to convince men, or to reclaim them; than there can be in a Private Miracle, though I ſee it with my Eyes.

And ſecondly, Though God ſhould be pleaſed to work a Miracle, or to ſend an Apparition for the Conviction of an obſtinate Unbeliever or vicious Perſon; yet ſuch a one would as eaſily find out ſhifts and ways to evade the force of ſuch an Argument, and to hinder the Effect it ought to have upon him, as he formerly did to put off the ordinary ſtanding Motives and Arguments of Religion: And conſequently, there is little probability, that he who is not gained by the former, will be wrought upon by the latter.

I begin with the firſt of theſe things. *That there is really more force and weight in a Publick ſtanding Revelation of God, to convince men, or to reclaim them; than there can be ſuppoſed to be in a Private ſingle Miracle, though a man ſees it with his Eyes: Or, than there can be in an Apparition from the dead, if God ſhould think fit to vouchſafe ſuch a thing.*

In ſpeaking to this, I mean not to concern my ſelf or you with the Revelation of *Moſes* and the Prophets, though that be the Revelation which the Text here ſpeaks of. I think it will be more ſuitable and uſeful to us to conſider the Propoſition with relation to Chriſtianity, or the Revelation of

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our Saviour and his Apoſtles: That being the Diſpenſation we are now under, and in which we are more immediately concerned.

Underſtanding therefore our Propoſition of that Eſpecial Revelation which we call the Goſpel, two things there are to be offered, which will undeniably make it out.

Firſt, Thoſe Perſons that lived in the Times of our Saviour, when this Publick Revelation of the Goſpel was made and atteſted, had greater Evidences and Motives to bring them over to the Belief and Practice of Religion; than if any particular Miracle had been wrought in order to their Converſion.

Secondly, We at this day, all things conſidered, have as ſtrong Arguments to convince us, as powerful Motives to perſuade us, as thoſe that lived in the Times of our Saviour, and were Witneſſes of what he did and taught.

The unavoidable Conſequences of which two Points are theſe. That thoſe who lived in the time of our Saviour, and were not perſuaded by his Goſpel, would not have been perſuaded though one had been ſent to them from the dead. And thoſe that are now alive, and are not perſuaded by the Evidences and Motives of Chriſtianity which we now have among us, would not have been perſuaded if they had lived in the Times of

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our Saviour. So that in all Ages of Chriſtianity the Propoſition will hold true, That thoſe who give no credit to the ſtanding Revelation of the Goſpel, or are not thereby induced to lead their Lives according to it; would not be prevailed upon though a particular Miracle was wrought for their Converſion.

Firſt then, *Our Saviour's Goſpel at the firſt publiſhing of it was a more effectual Means for the Converſion of any Man then living, than the ſending to him one from the dead.*

Let us ſuppoſe the Parable we are now upon, to be a true Hiſtory; and that this Rich man had five Brethren living at *Jeruſalem* at the time when our Saviour ſpoke it; and they were all wicked, lewd, Atheiſtical Perſons; and God Almighty, in pity to their Souls, is pleaſed to grant that Requeſt which the Rich man here makes to *Abraham* on their behalf; and accordingly ſends *Lazarus* from the dead to preach Repentance to them: We cannot doubt but ſuch a Sermon, from ſuch a Man, and in ſuch Circumſtances, would mightily awaken them, and put them upon a more ſerious Conſideration of the folly of their Ways, and the danger they expoſed them to, than ever they entred into before; and this Conſideration it is likely might work them to ſerious Reſolutions of quitting their preſent Courſes, and entring upon

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a ſtricter Life. Certainly ſuch an Apparition as this, in reaſon ſhould work ſuch Effects; and, without doubt, upon many it would. But this we ſay. Whether did not our Saviour perform a great deal more than all this comes to, in order to the Conviction and Converſion of all about him? And whether had not theſe five Brethren, ſuppoſing them to live when he preached his Goſpel, and to be Witneſſes of his Actions, much more reaſon to be perſuaded by what he did, and taught; than by the aforeſaid Viſion?

Our Saviour did by all the Signs and Tokens in the World evidence himſelf to be an Expreſs Meſſenger ſent from God, which they could not be certain that the Viſion was.

The Prophetick Records of their own Country did all teſtifie of him; and they themſelves, by comparing his Life and them together, might ſee they were fulfilled in him.

To omit the Circumſtances of his Birth, which were ſuch as never any beſides himſelf was born with; After he came to enter upon his Publick Employment, God did more than once by a Voice from Heaven teſtifie, that he had ſent him, and that all People were to hearken to him.

And the Truth of this he himſelf confirmed, not onely by his Life, which was the moſt Innocent, and Vertuous, and God-like that ever was:

Nor onely by his Sermons and Doctrines, which were the moſt Perfect and Unexceptionable, and every way the moſt worthy of God, that ever were taught among Men: But alſo, and moſt chiefly, by his extraordinary Works, which were ſuch as none but God, or one Acted by a Divine Power, could poſſibly perform.

He did the greateſt things that ever were ſeen by Men. He ſhewed by his Actions, and thoſe moſt publickly done, and frequently repeated, that he had an abſolute Sovereign Power over the Courſe of Nature; over the Inviſible Agents of this World, as well Angels as Devils; and likewiſe over both the Bodies and the Souls of Men.

And particularly to make it appear that his Teſtimony was more Authentick, his Authority more to be relied on, than that of any Ghoſt, any *Lazarus* whatſoever that ſhould riſe from the dead: It was very uſual with him to ſend again to the Living thoſe that were once dead. And one *Lazarus* he really brought again from the Boſom of *Abraham*, after he had been four days dead, to teſtifie to the World that *Jeſus* was the Great Embaſſador that God had ſent, and that all Mankind were to receive and obey him.

And leſt all this ſhould not be convincing enough; leſt it ſhould be ſaid ſtill, One that ſhould riſe from the dead, and come and preach to us, would

would leave the greater Impreſſions upon us: *Jeſus* himſelf did riſe from the dead, and did come and preach to the World, and that in a far more convincing manner than the Ghoſt of *Lazarus* would have done, if the Rich man had had his own Wiſh. For *Jeſus* told his own Death before-hand, and foretold alſo his Reſurrection; And if God meant not to lay an invincible Temptation before Mankind to believe a Falſhood, it had concerned his Providence to have hindred this Reſurrection, if *Jeſus* had been any thing elſe than what he pretended to be: But he did riſe after three days, according to his Prediction, and converſed upon Earth with his Followers for forty days together, ſhewing himſelf not onely to a few particular Diſciples, but to great Crowds of them, Five hundred at a time. And after this, in the ſight of his Friends he took his leave of the World, and aſcended up into Heaven. And for a Teſtimony how God approved him there, he ſent down the Holy Spirit upon his Diſciples, who for many years together enabled them to do our Saviour's Miracles over again, in confirmation of his Doctrine.

If now, to come to our Argument; if theſe five Brethren of the Rich man be ſuppoſed to be alive when all theſe things came to paſs; If they had the Opportunity of being preſent at many

of these Passages, and of satisfying themselves of the rest, (as certainly, supposing the Matter of Fact to be true, none that lived at that time, and in that Country, but had this Opportunity;) If they heard this *Jesus* that was sent from God at the first, and that was sent from God the second time, after he was dead, testifying against their Sins, forewarning them of the Judgment to come, and assuring them of Eternal Rewards if they would repent: I say, If they were Witnesses of these things, I will appeal to all the World, whether they had not greater Means of Conviction offered to them, than if any Ghost had appeared to them from the Dead; or any particular Miracle had been vouchsafed them for the bringing them over to Vertue and Sobriety.

But I believe no body will much doubt of this; for indeed the Matter will not bear a Dispute. But here is the Question; Whether we that live at this distance from our Saviour, have the same Means of Conviction? and, Whether one now appearing from the dead to us, would not be of greater force to perswade us, than the standing Revelation of the Gospel, as we have it now conveyed to us?

This therefore leads me to my second Proposition upon this Head, which if it can be made out, will wholly take away all Controversie in this matter. And it is this: *That*

That we at this day have as great Arguments to convince us of the Truth of Christ's Revelation, and consequently as great Motives from thence to perſuade us to reform our Evil Lives, as thoſe that lived in the Times of our Saviour.

It is true indeed, we want the Evidence of Senſe in theſe Matters, which they had; and upon that account, it muſt be acknowledged, that they have the Advantage of us. But this we ſay, notwithſtanding, That if we take all things together, and weigh them Impartially, we ſhall find, that that Want is abundantly ſupplied to us in other reſpects.

For, *firſt* of all, Our Saviour's Goſpel, and all the Evidences of it I have been now ſpeaking of, were timely and faithfully recorded, and are as faithfully tranſmitted down to us. So that though we did not ſee or hear thoſe things, yet we have a certain and exact Account of them; and ſuch an Account as was never yet queſtioned by any Adverſaries that lived in thoſe Times, when ſuch a Queſtion was moſt reaſonably to be made; and ſuch an Account as appears by all the Evidences that a thing of that nature is capable of, to have been written by Eye-witneſſes, and ſuch Witneſſes as were honeſt undeſigning Men; and not onely ſo, but they ſealed with their Blood the Truth of what they reported. And this ſame Account was

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religiously received by all Christians, in all Places, without contradiction, in those very Times, and was shortly after translated into a multitude of Languages, so that it is scarce possible it should in any Considerable matter be corrupted. And from that time to this, in a continual succession, there have been men that have suffer'd Martyrdom for the Attestation of it; and in the first Ages after *Christ*, when they had the best Opportunities of examining the Truth of these things, many thousands did so.

Now I say, Though according to the ordinary Proverb, *Seeing be believing*: Yet next to Seeing, an Universal, Well-grounded Tradition, which hath visible Effects attending it, hath the most force to gain belief. Nay, I do not know whether there be so much difference between the Evidence of the one and the other, as one would think at first. Sure I am, there are many Cases in which we do as firmly believe Matters of Fact upon the Credit of Tradition, and the permanent Effects that do accompany it, as if we our selves had been present, and seen them with our Eyes. Which of us, for Instance, doth make any more doubt of the Story of *William* the Conquerour his subduing this Kingdom, or of *Henry* the Eighth his casting off the Pope's Supremacy; than he doth of the Revolutions that have hapned in his

his own time? And yet these Matters of Fact are not better attested than the History of our Saviour, and his Miracles and Doctrines.

But, *secondly*, Though those that lived in our Saviour's time had evidence of Sense for the truth of what they believed concerning him and his Doctrine, which we have not: Yet this is to be considered; that they laboured under far greater Prejudices against his Religion, than we now do: And consequently, all that sensible Proof which they had of the Truth of it, would not be more effectual for the convincing of them; than that Proof we now have, though it be less, ought in reason to be for the convincing of us.

They that were the Hearers and Spectators of what our Saviour said and did, had mighty and invetcrate Prepossessions to struggle with. They were educated in a quite different Religion, and so must be supposed to have entertained several Notions and Principles which would very difficultly be rooted out; and indeed, for the effecting of it, there needed little less than an Almighty Power. But it is not so with us; we by our Education are already disposed and prepared for the receiving Christianity. We have no prævious Engagements to alienate our Minds from it; nay, it is our Interest to be of that Religion, rather than any other. So that certainly a less Evidence for

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the Truth of it, will be as convincing to us, as a much greater would have been to thoſe to whom our Saviour firſt Preached. Nay, I am very confident that this thing being duely conſidered, it will appear, that our Arguments for Chriſtianity drawn from Tradition, will be more convincing to thinking men among us, than thoſe Arguments they had from Senſe and Experience could be to them.

But, *thirdly*, If to what hath been ſaid we add the ſeveral Arguments for the Credibility of the Chriſtian Religion which we now have at this diſtance, that they had not, nor could have, that were our Saviour's Immediate Diſciples; we ſhall be ſatisfied, that in point of Evidence we have indeed much the advantage of them. We have now ſeveral ſtanding Proofs of our Religion, which they could not have; and which are ſo ſtrong and concluſive, that they do more than compenſate for the want of that Evidence of Senſe which they had, and we have not. I briefly inſtance in theſe three following.

Firſt, The ſtrange Propagation and Succeſs of our Religion throughout the World, and the Means by which it was effected. That a poor deſpiſed crucified Perſon ſhould in a few years draw all the *Roman* Empire after him; and that without any viſible Means, except the Goodneſs of his

his Cauſe, and the Reaſonableneſs of his Doctrine, and the Sincerity and Conſtancy of his Diſciples, not in fighting for their Maſter, but in laying down their Lives for him: And this againſt all the Power, and all the Arts and Stratagems that the Devil or the Princes of this World could invent to ſtifle and ſuppreſs his Name: This is ſo ſtrong an Argument that this Cauſe was the Cauſe of God, and that his Providence was particularly concerned in the promoting of it, that he muſt ſeem little to be ſenſible either of God or Providence, that is not convinced by it.

If Chriſtianity had been of the ſame ſtrain that the Religion of *Mahomet* is; had been as well calculated for Mens Luſts and Worldly Intereſts, as that is; had allowed as many ſenſual Liberties to its Diſciples as that doth; and laſtly, had been carried on in the World by the ſame ways and means that that hath been, that is, by the Force of Arms and Dint of the Sword; It would have been no great wonder that it ſhould have prevailed, as we ſee it hath done. But that a Religion which had no Worldly Advantages to promiſe to its Followers; nay, on the contrary, was ſo contrived, that none could own it, but he muſt at the ſame time deny all his Temporal Intereſts, quit his Friends, his Reputation, and all his Fortunes in this World, and live in hourly expectati-

on of a Martyrdom; that ſuch a Religion as this, ſhould not onely not die with the firſt Broachers of it, but daily grow and ſpread; and the more it was perſecuted, the more increaſe; till at laſt it ſo weathered out all Oppoſition, that it got Poſſeſſion of the Thrones of Princes, and Kings became Nurſing Fathers to it: I ſay, Whoever is not convinced that the Finger of God was in this, would ſcarce have been convinced that the Finger of God was in our Saviour's Miracles, had he been alive and preſent when they were done. But this Effect of Chriſtianity both the Prophets and our Lord long ago foretold, and this we now ſee was verified long ago, and is ſtill verified in our days: Though thoſe that lived with our Saviour had no experience hereof, nor perhaps would ſeveral of them have been forward to believe it though it had been told them. So that in this reſpect we have a moſt Conſiderable Argument for our Religion, which they had not.

Secondly, This is not all. Thoſe that undertook the Religion of our Saviour upon his Preaching, had no experience of it: They were to be the firſt Experimenters themſelves. They ran a great Riſque, and ventured the Sale of all that they had, and yet knew not ſo certainly what kind of Treaſure they ſhould purchaſe. But we have the Experience and Suffrage of Sixteen Ages, which will all

all vouch, that what we lay out in this way will prove valuable Treaſure, will reward all the Pains and all the Expence we are at for the purchaſing of it. We have never in the compaſs of our own knowledge, nor in all Hiſtory, met with any who ſeriouſly laid out themſelves in the Service of *Jeſus Chriſt*, and lived up to his Religion, that ever grudged the Pains they took about it, or repented themſelves that they believed or practiſed as they did. The more any Man has been a Chriſtian, ſtill the more he hath thanked God for it; ſtill the more Quiet of Mind and Peace of Conſcience he hath poſſeſſed; the more he hath enjoyed himſelf, and the leſs he hath feared Death and all other outward Calamities. If ever any Chriſtian hath repented of any thing, it is, that he hath not been Chriſtian enough, that he hath not ſo heartily believed in our Saviour, and obeyed his Precepts, as he ſhould have done. This we all know, and muſt be ſenſible of; and it is a mighty Evidence of the Truth and Goodneſs of the Religion we profeſs. We now can try our Religion, and give our Approbation of it, by the ſame Standard and Meaſures, by which we try and approve of our Cuſtoms and Common Laws. After long experience we find the Uſefulneſs and the Conveniency of it, and to put another in its place, would involve us in horrible Miſchiefs, and Dangers, and

Perplexities. But this Argument for Chriſtianity, thoſe that were the firſt Converts to it could not have, and therefore in this reſpect alſo we have the advantage of them.

Thirdly and laſtly, There is another very Conſiderable ſtanding Argument for the Truth of the Chriſtian Revelation, which thoſe in our Saviour's time were uncapable of; and that is, the Events which he by the Spirit of Prophecy foretold ſhould after his death come to paſs in the World; moſt of which have punctually hapned as he predicted them, and the reſt in due time we doubt not will be accompliſhed. I have not leiſure to proſecute this Argument particularly; onely two things I cannot paſs by without mention, in both of which our Lord ſhewed himſelf as wonderful and as true a Prophet as ever appeared in the World.

The one is, the Deſtruction of *Jeruſalem* and the Temple, which he foretold with all the Circumſtances imaginable, both as to Time and Manner. Now all that he ſaid concerning that Deſtruction, was punctually verified, even according to the Accounts that the *Jewiſh* Hiſtorian gives us of that Matter. And when afterwards *Julian* the Emperour, with a deſign to blaſt the Credit of our Saviour's Prophecy, reſolved to re-edifie that Temple, and ſet Men on work for that purpoſe;

purpoſe; he was ſoon forced to deſiſt from his Enterpriſe, by Earthquakes, and Globes of Fire iſſuing from out of the Foundations: As the Writers of that time, both Chriſtian and Pagan, do aſſure us.

The other Inſtance I mention is, our Saviour's Prophecy of the Rejection of the *Jews*, and that they ſhould be *carried Captive into all Nations till the Times of the Gentiles were fulfilled.* Now this we ſee hath been accompliſhed for many Ages, and ſtill continues to be ſo in our days. That Nation of the *Jews* who were once the Peculiar People of God, ſetled in the Land of *Canaan* by his own immediate Hand, are now diſperſed all the World over, but no where incorporated into a Nation. Yet, which indeed is wonderful, they continue *Jews* ſtill; a People that mingle not with the reſt of the World, and that are ſtill as zealous for the Scriptures, from whence we fetch the Grounds of our Chriſtianity, as ever they were. So that they are a ſtanding Monument of God's Vengeance upon a People for rejecting the Goſpel, and a ſtanding Teſtimony of the Truth of our Saviour's Prophecies.

Theſe things now, with others that I might name, are very conſiderable Evidences of the Truth of our Religion, which thoſe that were Contemporary with our Saviour could not have.

So

ſo that putting all theſe things together, I think we may ſafely draw our Concluſion, *viz.* That we now have as great or greater Arguments to convince us of the truth of Chriſts Revelation, as, or than they had who were Witneſſes of what he did and taught. And conſequently, thoſe that are not perſwaded now by the Evidence of it, would not have been perſwaded though they had ſeen with their Eyes, or heard with their Ears the Publication of the Goſpel: Which is in effect to ſay, They would not have been perſwaded though one had riſen from the dead.

But notwithſtanding all this that I have ſaid, it is to be feared the thing will not eaſily go down with many of us; but ſtill, with the Rich Man in the Parable, after all that *Abraham* had ſaid concerning *Moſes* and the Prophets, we will inſiſt on our former Notion. *Nay, but if one came to us from the Dead, we ſhould repent.* The Motives that are offered to us in the Goſpel are old and ſtale to us, we find by long experience, that they make no great impreſſions upon us: But if we were viſited in ſuch an extraordinary way as the Rich man here deſired for his Brethren, we ſhould then undoubtedly be prevailed upon. Thus I believe ſeveral of us think: But that we have little ground for ſuch a fancy; nay, indeed, if we were tried in this way, that it is ten to one, we ſhould find

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our ſelves miſtaken; this may further convince us, *viz.*

If God ſhould indeed vouchſafe to work a Miracle, or to ſend an Apparition for the Conviction of an Obſtinate Unbeliver, or vicious Perſon: Yet ſuch a one would as eaſily find out ſhifts and ways to evade the force of ſuch an Argument, and to hinder the effects it ought to have upon him, as he formerly did to put off the ſtanding Motives and Arguments of Religion. And conſequently, there is little probability that he who is deaf to Moſes *and the Prophets, will be perſwaded by one from the dead.*

This is the ſecond Point I laid down for the proof of our Saviours Propoſition, and I come now to ſpeak to it.

I deny not indeed, but if an Apparition ſhould be made to a wicked Perſon among us: If, for inſtance, One of our Companions ſhould, after he is dead, in a terrible manner come to any of us, and in a doleful tone and language tell us, how it goes with him in the other World; tell us, that there is indeed a God that judges the Earth, that there is a Heaven, that there is a Hell, (all which things he as well as we made it our buſineſs to baniſh out of our minds as much as we could;) and acquaint us what an infinite unſpeakable happineſs he hath loſt by living looſely and careleſly, as we now do, and that he is damned, irrecoverably

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and for ever damned for that Infidelity, and thoſe lewd courſes we ſhared with him in the guilt of, and do ſtill continue to purſue; that all thoſe Revels we had together, all thoſe Pranks and Debauches we were joint Actors in, do now, as to him, end in unſupportable anguiſh and pains, in the gnawings of a Worm that never dies, and in a life of everlaſting Burnings; and that this ſhall certainly be our portion as well as his, unleſs we do prevent it by a ſpeedy reformation of our Lives:

I ſay, If one of our Friends ſhould come from the Dead, and tell us all this, there is no doubt but it would ſtrike us with infinite horrour and amazement. It would be the moſt confounding Scene that ever our Eyes beheld, the moſt awakening Lecture that ever our Ears heard; and ſuch impreſſions it would, in all likelihood, make upon us, as would not ſuddenly be worn out.

But here is the point, Whether all this would be effectual for the working a perfect change of Life, a laſting Reformation, upon a Man that hath long reſiſted the ordinary means of Converſion, and by long cuſtom of ſinning hath made a courſe of Vice almoſt natural to him? We ſay, in all probability it would not be effectual for the reforming ſuch a Man; becauſe it would be ſo eaſie after the firſt Heats, which the Viſion occaſioned

ſioned, were over, to find out colourable excuſes, and evaſions why he ſhould not purſue a Reformation, which his Soul ſo much hated, and which his preſent Intereſts and Appetites were ſo much againſt.

For, *firſt* of all, though he was never ſo ſenſibly ſmit at the firſt; yet after a little time, the infinite love he bears to that courſe of life which this Viſion came to teſtifie againſt, would put him upon Inventions for the rendring the credit of his very Senſes doubtful and ſuſpected. Many Reaſons would be ſuggeſted to him from his bribed Underſtanding, why he ſhould not in this caſe believe his own Eyes. For why might not all this be a meer deluſion, the effects of a Melancholy diſtempered Fancy, a Buſineſs wholly tranſacted on the Stage of his Imagination.

That he had ſuch an Apparition, and that he was horribly frighted with it, he cannot doubt: But whether this Apparition was really preſented to his outward Senſes, and was not onely the Fiction of his own heated and diſturbed Brain, he thinks he hath reaſon to doubt.

For he remembers, that even in Dreams things have been as livelily repreſented to him, and made as great Impreſſions on him, as the ſame things could have been or done if he had been awake. And he knows very well, that Fancy hath a ſtrange

power over a mans Judgment, even when his Eyes are wide open; especially if the circumstances of being alone, of Melancholy and Pensiveness, and some particular Accidents do concur to the raising of it.

How many People meet with Goblins in their Night-walks, and see Armies fighting in the Air, and assuredly perswade themselves and others that they do so? When as in truth the one is nothing else but Trees; and the other, but Clouds formed into such shapes by the power of their Imagination. How many Persons in Feverish Distempers see plainly Fiends and Devils standing at their Beds-feet, ready to take them away, and hear dreadful Noises? But yet none is so simple as to believe these to be Realities, but onely the Effects of their present Frenzy. And why may not this Bugbear of a Vision, that did at first so fright the Man, be a thing of the same kind, a meer Creature of his own disordered Fancy?

It is certainly not impossible for a Man whose concernment it is, not to believe any thing of this nature, at last to bring himself to such an Opinion.

Especially when he is helped forward by the concurrent Votes of all his jolly Companions, whom he tells the thing to, who, to be sure, will not fail to laugh heartily, and make very merry with

with his Story; and, if it be poſſible, to droll it out of his Head, by perſuading him, that the whole Matter was but the Reſult of Melancholy and a crazed Brain; and that if he ſtill continues to believe it, he is fitter for *Bedlam* than their Company.

But, *ſecondly*, Suppoſing he cannot thus eaſily baffle the Credit of his Senſes; but is forced to believe, that what he ſaw and heard was more than a Fancy or Imagination: Yet that inveterate Principle of Vice within him will put him upon other ways and contrivances for the hindring that Effect which the Viſion ought in reaſon to have upon him. Though he cannot queſtion the Truth of the Matter of Fact; yet it is likely he may queſtion the Force of the Argument drawn from thence for his Conviction.

Here is one pretends to come to him from the Dead; but how ſhall he be certain that he did really come from thence? For any thing he knows, it may be ſome Trick put upon him. Some knaviſh Fellow had a mind to fright him, or ſome bigotted Religioniſt, aſſuming the Perſon of a Ghoſt, thought by this pious Fraud to convert him to his Perſuaſion; as he hath read in Story, ſuch Pranks have been plaid to ſerve a Turn, or promote a good Cauſe. And whereas his Reaſon might tell him, that this could not be ſo, ſee-

ing the Perſon that appeared to him had both the Countenance and the Voice of his Friend: Yet that he would get over; The Impoſture was cunningly carried on, and the Surpriſe and Fright it put him into, did ſo diſorder his Judgment, that he was not able to diſtinguiſh between the True and the Counterfeit.

But ſuppoſing he be convinced, that here was no Juggle in the matter, but what appeared was a true Spirit or a Ghoſt, if there be any ſuch: Yet how ſhall he know that it was the Ghoſt of his Friend? If he was ſure it was he, he would give credit to what he reported, becauſe of the former experience he had had of his Integrity: But this he cannot any way be certain of. For any thing he knows to the contrary, it may be one of thoſe ill-natured Inhabitants of the Air, that are ſo much talked of, that make it their Buſineſs to diſturb the Reſt and Quiet of Mankind; and take a pleaſure in filling their Heads with Fears and Scruples, and drawing them to all kind of Superſtition.

He hath heard and read of ſuch: And there is no Man of any Perſuaſion or Religion, *Jew*, *Turk*, or *Heathen*; nay, all the ſeveral ſorts of Heathens at this day, which are to be found either in the *Eaſt* or the *Weſtern Indies*; and *Chriſtians* too of all Communions: There is none of theſe but

have Stories to tell of Apparitions and Visions, for the confirmation of their several Doctrines and Tenets. Now that all these Apparitions are to have credit given to them, is absurd; because they contradict one another in their Discoveries. How therefore can he tell whether this particular Apparition that is made to him, ought to be credited or no, as to what it declares concerning Religion, and the State of the other World? In plain *English*, rather than such a Man as we are speaking of, will be prevailed upon to quit his dearly-beloved Lusts and Vices, he will find Excuses and Reasons a great many, why he ought not to believe any thing that is conveyed to him in such a manner as we now suppose.

Especially, if we consider, in the *Third* place, What Advantages he will make for his purpose from that very way that we now think would be most effectual to convert him; that is, *One coming from the Dead.* Here is an Apparition pretends to be sent upon a particular Message to him from the other World, to perswade him to embrace such a Religion, and to change his way of Living; and threatens him with horrible punishments if he doth not: The very unusualness of the thing will put some Apprehensions into him, (especially considering his concernment to find out all the ways that can be, to elude the force of the Ar-

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gument) that it is not ſo convincing, doth not carry in it ſo great Evidence as at firſt ſight there ſeemed to appear. For what Imaginable Reaſon can be given, why he ſhould be dealt with in a way ſo different from that that the reſt of Mankind are? The Particularity of the Miracle will give occaſion to him to ſuſpect the truth of what it diſcovers. If his Neighbours and Friends were thus haunted, he might think he had reaſon to be alarmed, and to apprehend ſome danger in that courſe of life he is ſo much diſwaded from: But ſince none in the place where he lives, is thus exerciſed beſides himſelf; he cannot ſatisfie his Reaſon, as to this way of Proceeding with him. If this Means of Conviction was rational and ſtrong, without doubt others would have it afforded to them, and be convinced by it as well as he. But ſince no ſuch thing appears, as the Apparition it ſelf is unaccountable, ſo are the Arguments and Motives it offers, unaccountable alſo. And till he be convinced in the ſame way, and by the ſame Reaſons that other Men are, he will continue as he is.

I repreſent theſe things, not to ſhew the weakneſs or invalidity of ſuch an Argument as we are ſpeaking of, but to ſhew how eaſily thoſe that have eſpouſed Intereſts inconſiſtent with Religion and Chriſtianity may find out Expedients for the avoiding the force of it. But,

But, *Fourthly*, and laſtly, Let all this go for nothing. Let us ſuppoſe the man to be very well ſatisfied in his own mind, both concerning the matter of Fact, and the cogency of the Argument he hath from thence to live after another rate than he hath hitherto done; nay, as often as he thinks of this Viſion, or is asked concerning it, he hath the ſame Senſe, and makes the ſame Judgment of it that he did at firſt, though it be many Years after: I ſay, ſuppoſing all this, yet doth it from hence follow, That ſuch a Man will be effectually brought over to Virtue and Religion, after he hath long purſued a courſe of ſin, and reſiſted the Arguments of the Goſpel? Alas it is very unlikely. How much alarmed ſoever he was at firſt, yet it is a hundred to one (if he be ſuch a Perſon as we ſpeak of) but in time, and by degrees, the impreſſions will wear off, and Nature return to its firſt courſe. It was the newneſs and ſurprizingneſs of the thing, that firſt wrought upon him; but that will not laſt always. After he hath once got over the firſt Tranſports, and is come again to his uſual temper, and to his Buſineſs, and to his Company; the Argument, though it have the ſame force that it had at firſt, yet it grows flat and unaffecting, and will have no more effect upon him than the ſtanding Motives of Chriſtianity formerly had. Notwithſtanding all his firſt Convictions, he

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will live as tamely under the Bondage and Tyranny of his old reigning Lusts (though perhaps not without some checks of Conscience now and then,) as those that never had such kind of means vouchsafed them for their Conversion.

And it must needs be thus; for when all is done, Arguments will still be but Arguments. They can perswade, but they cannot compel. The efficacy of them doth in a great measure depend upon our will and choice, especially where they are to combate with strong Passions and Prepossessions.

Are there not a thousand Persons in our days, that are as fully convinced of the Truth of the Christian Revelation, and the Necessity of a Holy Religious Life in order to the going to Heaven, or avoiding the Pains of Hell, as they would be if one should come to them from the Dead? Nay, more fully, perhaps, than they would have been by the Testimony of such an Apparition had they wanted the Scriptures. And have not the Consciences of these Persons, at several times, by several means, been severely awakened? And have they not at these seasons in the most serious manner imaginable made Vows and Resolutions to live a Holy Christian Life? And yet we see they continue still unreformed, still they are the same sensual, careless, unchristian Livers that ever they were. I

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appeal to the Conſciences of Men, whether this be not true; and why ſhould we think it would fare otherwiſe with us, if God ſhould ſend one from the Dead to reclaim us? That very Miracle would not convince our Underſtandings more than they have been convinced already, and therefore why ſhould we think it would work more upon our Wills?

The ſum of all this Diſcourſe is this. That how prevailing ſoever we may imagine ſuch an experiment, as the Rich man here offers to *Abraham* for the Converſion of his Brethren, would be upon us, yet a ſenſual man, that was unwilling to give up himſelf to the Conduct of Religion, might eaſily find out ways to avoid the force that it ought to have upon his mind; nay, more eaſily perhaps than he hath hitherto reſiſted the Motives of the Goſpel. And therefore we may certainly conclude with *Abraham* in the Text, that they *that hear not* Moſes *and the Prophets*, or to put it into our own Language, They that hear not Chriſt and his Apoſtles, *neither*, in all probability, *would they be perſwaded though one roſe from the dead.*

Nothing now remains, but that I draw two or three Inferences from what hath been ſaid, and ſo Conclude.

In the *first* place, from what I have Diſcourſed upon this Argument, we may diſcover the infinite Wiſdom of God, in the pitching upon that Method he hath done, for the bringing Men to Virtue and Happineſs, namely, by the ſtanding Revelations of *Moſes* and the Prophets, and of Chriſt and his Apoſtles. For we may perceive this Method is every way more accommodated for that End, than if God ſhould be every day working Miracles for the reclaiming particular Perſons.

As it is more ſuitable to the other Methods of God's Providence; to the way that he hath choſen for the Government of the World, (which is by the ſetled ſtanding Laws of Motion, leaving Natural Cauſes to produce their Natural Effects, and not interpoſing his Omnipotency, but upon eſpecial extraordinary Occaſions): So alſo, as we have ſeen, is it much more effectual for the convincing Mens Underſtandings, and the working upon their Wills, than the other Method of Private Miracles and Revelations would be.

We have ſeen how many ways the Force of an Argument drawn from ones appearance from the Dead may be evaded: But now none of theſe Pretences can be made againſt the Evidence of a Publick Revelation, ſo atteſted, and confirmed, and conveyed down to us, as that of Chriſtianity is. And beſides, there are many Arguments to be drawn

drawn from ſuch a Revelation, to ſhew the Credibility of it, which are altogether wanting to ſuch a Private Miracle as we ſpeak of.

Secondly, We may learn from hence, what little need there is of any new modern Miracles for the confirming to us any Doctrine of Chriſtianity which was long ago, in all the Articles of it, ſo well atteſted by the Illuſtrious Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles.

And more eſpecially we may learn from hence, what little credit is to be given to thoſe Miracles that are wrought or pretended to be wrought for the proof of ſuch Doctrines as are really contrary to that Revelation of our Lord, as it is delivered in the Holy Scriptures.

We are ſure that *Moſes* and the Prophets, *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles, taught nothing but the Truth of God, he having ſo publickly and ſo convincingly ſet his Seal to all their Doctrines. And we are ſure likewiſe that the Scripture contains nothing in it but what was taught by them, and conſequently muſt be the truth of God alſo. And therefore, if any Doctrine or Article of Religion be at any time recommended to our belief, that doth not agree with theſe Holy Writings, or doth contradict them either directly or by plain unavoidable conſequence; we may be equally ſure that that Doctrine cannot be true, nor is to

be received by us, though we are told of never ſo many Private Miracles that have been wrought for the confirmation of it.

Our Rule in theſe Caſes is, *To the Law and to the Teſtimony*; To the Publick and Undoubted Oracles of God, in the Old and New Teſtament. Whatever Doctrine can be proved out of them, we are bound to embrace it without a new Miracle. On the other ſide, Whatever Doctrine is inconſiſtent with them, we muſt reject it, though an *Angel from Heaven*, or *one from the Dead* ſhould come and preach it to us.

Thirdly, From hence we ſee the Vanity and Unreaſonableneſs of thoſe Men, that not content with the Ordinary Means of Grace, are always wiſhing for Extraordinaries. There are a great many of us that will be ſaved by Methods of our own chuſing, otherwiſe we will not be ſaved at all. As it was in St. *Paul*'s time, the *Jews* they required a *Sign*; the *Greeks*, they were for *Wiſdom* and Philoſophy; and perhaps a third ſort of Men were for another kind of means of Conviction: So it is among us.

Here is one Man would have a particular Miracle wrought for his Converſion. If he could ſee a Spirit or a Ghoſt, he would believe there was another World. If God would ſend an Angel from Heaven to preach to him, he thinks he ſhould become a New Man. Here

Here is another would believe the Goſpel, if every point of it could be demonſtrated by Reaſon, and a clear and plain account be given of all the Myſteries of it: but till that be done, he is of the Religion of the Philoſophers.

Here is another Man waits for Immediate Impulſes and Inſpirations. The ordinary Aſſiſtances of the Spirit that accompany the Word and Sacraments will not do his buſineſs.

But let us not deceive our ſelves. All theſe Imaginations are vain and fooliſh. If God ſhould grant us our ſeveral deſires; and give one of us a *Sign*, another of us a *Demonſtration*, another of us a *powerful Conviction* upon our Minds, from his Holy Spirit, and that in an extraordinary way: Yet it is ſtill very doubtful, whether, for all this, the Buſineſs of our Converſion would be effected.

None was more confident than the Rich man in the Parable, that if to the Teſtimony of *Moſes* and the Prophets, was ſuperadded a new Miracle, his Brethren would certainly be perſuaded: But yet you ſee, our Saviour affirms the direct contrary.

Oh let us all cloſe with the ſtanding Publick Methods which God hath eſtabliſhed in the Church, for the bringing us to Vertue and eternal Happineſs, and not be hankering after new

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and fanciful ways of our own chuſing. Moſt certainly, the Ordinary Means of Grace are ſufficient for the Salvation of all our Souls, and will be effectual to that End, if we be not wanting to our ſelves. And if any Extraordinaries be at any time needful, God without doubt will ſupply us with them alſo.

Fourthly, and laſtly, From what hath been ſaid, we ſee the horrible Guilt and the utter Inexcuſableneſs of thoſe Men, that notwithſtanding the Goſpel-means of Salvation, that have been ſo long afforded them, do ſtill continue Infidels in their Judgment, or Immoral in their Lives.

What will theſe Men be able to ſay for themſelves, when they come to appear before the Judge of the World, at the great Day of Accounts? Will they pretend there was not force enough in the Goſpel-evidence to convince them, or weight enough in its Motives to reclaim them? Ah! their own Hearts will give them the Lie. They can no longer be able to deceive themſelves. There will be no Unbelievers, no feared Conſciences, in the other State. They will then be clearly convinced, that God for his part did all that was neceſſary, nay, all that was fit to be done, in order to their Salvation: But they were reſolved to ſhut their Eyes, and harden their Hearts againſt the gracious Means that were tendred them.

Oh,

Oh, how will the Rich man and his five Brethren in Hell riſe up in Judgment againſt theſe Men? For they onely refuſed to hear *Moſes* and the Prophets: But theſe, beſides them, have obſtinately refuſed to hear *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles, who brought abundantly greater Light into the World than the former did.

Much more, How will the poor ignorant *Heathens* riſe up in Judgment againſt them? Who were deſtitute both of *Moſes* and *Chriſt*; and yet, to the ſhame of *Chriſtians* it may be ſpoken, have ſeveral of them lived better Lives than many of us do.

May not we juſtly and ſadly apply that Woe which our Saviour pronounced of *Chorazin* and *Bethſaida*, to Thouſands among us? Woe unto you Unbelievers; Woe unto you, O obſtinate and irreclaimable Sinners; for if the mighty Means of Grace, the mighty Evidence of Truth, had been afforded to *Tyre* and *Sidon*, to *Sodom* and *Gomorrha*, to *Mahometans* and *Pagans*; that have been afforded unto you; *they would long ago have repented in Sackcloth and Aſhes. But I ſay unto you, It ſhall be more tolerable for all theſe in the day of Judgment, than for you.*

God Almighty give us all Grace ſeriouſly to conſider theſe things, that we may by a timely and hearty

hearty closing with his Methods and Designs f
our Salvation, prevent the dismal Consequenc
of Infidelity and Vicious Life; that so it m
not be our Condemnation at the last day. Th
Light is come into the World, and we hav
loved Darkness rather than Light.

FINIS.